



Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.

BACKGROUND

Land and Climate

Hungary is a landlocked nation in central Europe. It is slightly larger than Portugal and slightly smaller than the U.S. state of Indiana. Most of the east is flat, but the northwest has rolling hills and low mountains. Almost 50 percent of the land is suitable for cultivation, producing a variety of grains and grapes. The capital, Budapest, is actually the union of two cities (Buda and Pest) lying on opposite sides of the Duna (Danube River). They united in 1872 as Budapest, once nicknamed the Paris of the East.

The climate is continental, with cold winters and warm, dry summers. The average temperature in winter is about 32°F (0°C) and in summer is 70 to 75°F (21–24°C).

History

Early History and the Magyars

The area of present-day Hungary was inhabited by Illyrian and Celtic tribes by 400 BC. Western areas became part of the Roman Empire in 14 BC as the province of Pannonia, while eastern areas were controlled by Germanic and other tribes. After the Romans lost control of Pannonia in the late fourth century AD, Germanic and Slavic tribes took over, followed by the Huns and the Avars. By the ninth century, nomadic Magyars (the ancestors of today's ethnic Hungarians) were arriving from the east. In 896, the Magyars, led by Árpád,

conquered the resident Slavs and Huns and began permanent settlement.

The Árpád Dynasty ruled for the next four hundred years, a period when the Kingdom of Hungary consolidated from various tribal alliances into a powerful centralized state. Stephen I became Hungary's first Christian king in 1000 and converted the people to Christianity. Royal disputes followed the reign of Stephen I, and the Mongol invasion of 1241 devastated the country, further weakening the Árpád Dynasty, which ended in 1301. For the next two hundred years, Hungary was mostly ruled by foreign kings who also occupied foreign thrones.

The Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires

By the early 1500s, the Ottoman Empire rose to power in the region and soon conquered much of Hungary, which had been weakened by a series of internal rebel uprisings. At the same time, the Austrian Hapsburgs gained power in central Europe and controlled northwestern areas of Hungary. The next 150 years were marked by numerous wars between the Ottoman Turks and the Austrian Hapsburgs. By 1718, the Hapsburgs pushed out the Ottomans entirely, but Hungary remained a torn nation through the 1800s, when Hungarian nationalism emerged. Hungarians rose in rebellion against the Hapsburgs in 1848 but were defeated after two years of fighting.

Nevertheless, the Hapsburgs were eventually pushed to compromise with the Hungarians. In 1867, a power-sharing agreement between the Austrians and Hungarians established

a dual monarchy, which created the Austro-Hungarian Empire and gave Hungary more power and autonomy. Hungary saw rapid economic development over the next few decades, but Austria-Hungary was eventually shattered by nationalism and desire for self-rule among Slavic minorities. This division contributed to the beginning of World War I in 1914.

World Wars and the Communist Era

Following its defeat in World War I, the Austro-Hungarian Empire collapsed, and Hungary became an independent republic. However, the new nation lost more than two-thirds of its former territory and three-fifths of its people to newly created neighbor states, and the following two decades were marked by political turmoil and economic hardships. Hungary was a German ally through most of World War II, but Germany invaded in 1944 after Hungary began surrender negotiations with the Allies. Soviet troops drove out the Nazis in 1945, and elections again established a republic.

The Communist Party, under heavy influence from the Soviet Union, seized power within two years and by 1949 had declared Hungary a socialist state called the People's Republic of Hungary. Communist reformer Imre Nagy tried to change the system that emerged. He even withdrew Hungary from the Warsaw Pact and declared the country neutral in 1956. In response, the Soviet Union attacked Hungary, repressed the movement, executed Nagy, and buried him in disgrace. During this time, about 2,500 Hungarians lost their lives and 200,000 refugees fled the country. János Kádár then became the leader of the communist government until 1988, when he was forced to resign under pressure for reform. In October 1989, Hungary changed its name to the Republic of Hungary, abolished the communist monopoly on power, and established a multiparty democracy. Nagy was reburied as a national hero.

Economic and Political Transitions

After the fall of communism, the government of Hungary enacted reforms to build a free-market economy and to foster democracy as a way to promote closer economic and political integration with the West. Although economic reforms eventually stimulated growth and encouraged foreign investment, Hungary initially experienced high inflation and unemployment. At the same time, economic inequality, corruption, and crime increased, leading to discontent among many Hungarians, who increasingly had negative views of the post-communist policies encouraged by the West. Nevertheless, Hungary continued to seek closer ties with the West, joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in 1999 and the European Union (EU) in 2004.

An Illiberal Nation

In recent years, Hungary has reversed many of the economic and political reforms introduced after communist rule. When the 2008 global financial crisis hit, Hungary's already struggling economy was pushed to the brink of collapse, an outcome that was prevented by a financial package from the EU and other international organizations. Capitalizing on voter frustrations with the ailing economy and political turmoil, Viktor Orbán and his center-right Fidesz–Hungarian Civic Alliance won a landslide victory in 2010 elections.

Since coming to power, Prime Minister Orbán and his now right-wing government have moved Hungary toward what

Orbán has called an “illiberal” Christian democracy that rejects multiculturalism and immigration while promoting socially conservative values. Progressively viewed as authoritarian by the international community, Orbán's government has consolidated its grip on power by amending the constitution, rewriting election laws, overhauling the judiciary, controlling much of the media, and stifling dissent. Although such actions have put Hungary at odds with the EU, the nation continues to lobby for and benefit from the EU's financial support. Today, Hungary's many challenges include political polarization, rampant corruption, high emigration rates, labor shortages, and a strained public healthcare system.

THE PEOPLE

Population

Magyars (ethnic Hungarians) form the largest ethnic group (about 86 percent of the population). The Roma, Germans, Serbs, Slovaks, and Romanians comprise significant minorities. Budapest, the largest city, has a population of over 1.7 million. Hungarians comprise nearly 9 percent of Slovakia's population and over 6 percent of Romania's. Much of Hungary's population lives in severely polluted areas.

Language

Nearly all of the population speaks Magyar, or Hungarian, as it is referred to in other countries. Magyar is the official language and is part of the same language group as Estonian and Finnish. It has a complex grammar with restrictions on what sort of vowels may occur together within a word. In addition, the presence or absence of diacritical markings on words may change meaning. However, pronunciation is generally easy because each letter represents only one sound.

Most minority groups speak their own languages in addition to Hungarian. German and English are popular courses in school.

Religion

Roughly 37 percent of the population is Roman Catholic. The remainder is made up of Calvinists (roughly 12 percent), Lutherans (2 percent), Greek Catholics (2 percent), atheists, and others.

During communist rule, religious groups were carefully regulated through a government agency. In 1990, religious freedom was granted to all, and several Western churches began seeking new members in the country. Though religion does not play a large role in daily life, many people consider themselves devout Christians.

General Attitudes

Hungarians tend to be proud that their country experienced a form of democracy before most other nations. Even during the communist regime, Hungary was considered one of the most open and prosperous countries in Eastern Europe. It was one of the first to announce sweeping reforms and was able to accomplish them without violence or serious upheaval.

While most Hungarians were highly enthusiastic about

becoming part of the European Union, many have grown disillusioned with the income disparities between eastern and western Europe. Many Hungarians feel limited within Europe by their lack of foreign language skills. However, attitudes toward foreigners are generally positive.

Hungarians typically value independence, a strong and stable family, education (including good performance in school and an advanced degree), security (a job, a home, and social benefits), property (a home, garden, and car), access to or ownership of a summer cottage, and travel outside of Hungary. Interpersonal communication tends to be direct: Hungarians will freely offer opinions on a person's behavior, appearance, and personality. People admire professionals but generally do not admire the wealthy, who are often associated with corruption.

Hungarian Saying

Kicsi a bors, de erős. ("Small pepper, but strong".) This saying means that even something that is small can be powerful.

Personal Appearance

Clothing styles in urban areas generally follow those in western Europe. Young people tend to be brand-conscious and often wear jeans. Businessmen usually wear conservative suits, and businesswomen typically wear dress suits or pant suits with high heels. Formal dress for younger people is often colorful. Women tend to pay particular attention to their style and appearance.

Traditional costumes from different regions vary in color and sometimes in footwear and headwear. They are seen only in rural areas and during special celebrations and holidays such as Easter, Christmas, and harvest festivals. Women may wear intricately embroidered blouses and layered skirts, accented with colorful hats or scarves. Men often wear vests over loose-fitting shirts. Pants may be pleated, baggy, and less than full-length—or tight, black, and tucked inside boots. Men also wear a variety of hats.

CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

Greetings

Adults greet each other with a firm handshake. A man usually waits for a woman to extend her hand first when meeting for the first time. Among people of the same gender, the older person will offer his or her hand first. Friends also *puszi*, or kiss each other lightly on each cheek.

Urban Hungarians do not usually greet strangers on the street, but rural people will. Polite verbal greetings include *Jó napot kívánok* (Good day), *Jó reggelt kívánok* (Good morning), and *Jó estét kívánok* (Good evening). *Kívánok* is often left off in more casual circumstances or is replaced by a person's name. Children often greet older adults with the phrase *Kezét csókolom* (I kiss your hand). Adults, particularly men speaking to women, may use this with family or close friends to show special respect. Popular informal greetings include *Heló*, *Szervusz*, or *Szia*, which all mean "Hello." The latter two terms come from the Latin *Servus*, which once

meant "I am here to serve you." One might follow a greeting with *Hogy vagy?* (How are you?) or another question. When parting, Hungarians say *Viszontlátásra* (See you again) or simply *Heló*, *Viszlát*, or *Szia*.

When addressing someone, it is polite to use the person's professional title with his or her surname. People introduce themselves by surname, usually followed by the given name. Greetings on a first-name basis are limited to close friends and relatives. However, adults address the youth, and the youth address each other, by first name.

Gestures

Personal space in Hungary tends to be relatively small, and showing affection in public is accepted. Good friends, especially among the younger generation, will put their arms around each other's shoulders when they walk in public.

Talking with one's hands in one's pockets is considered impolite. While blowing one's nose in public is acceptable, repeated sniffing and nose-picking is considered rude. Shaking one's fist at someone, giving a "thumbs down," or holding a fist with the thumb between the index and middle fingers are all rude or vulgar gestures.

To wish a person happy birthday, some Hungarians will pull the person's earlobe slightly while saying *Boldog születésnapot* (Happy birthday). This tradition may be based on the Hungarian proverb that translates to "May God give you a long life, and may your ears be so long that they will touch your ankles," or it may relate to the traditional belief that ears continue to grow throughout a person's life.

Visiting

Close friends, relatives, and sometimes neighbors make short unannounced visits. However, extended visits should be arranged in advance, especially in urban areas. Relatives visit often.

When guests arrive, hosts often help them remove their coats. Guests also remove shoes upon entering a home; hosts may have a pair of guest slippers for them to wear. An informal atmosphere prevails. Hosts accompany departing guests outside.

Guests in the home usually are offered such refreshments as homemade cakes, coffee, tea, fruit juice, brandy, or one of many popular regional wines. Hosts offer their best and go to great lengths to make guests feel welcome.

When invited to dinner, it is polite to bring a small gift of flowers, boxed chocolates, or wine. Flowers are presented in odd numbers, and the hosts will usually display them on the dining table or in a room where the guests will be after dinner. Hungarians enjoy socializing in the home but also frequently meet at restaurants, coffeehouses, and tearooms.

Eating

Breakfast may be a light meal with only rolls and a drink, or it may be heartier and include eggs, salami, cheese, yogurt, and even hot peppers. Lunch is often the main meal, including soup, often salad, a main dish of meat and potatoes, and dessert with coffee. Most people eat a light dinner of cold cuts, fruit, bread or rolls, and a drink.

Before eating or when entering a room where someone is eating, Hungarians say *Jó étvágyat* (literally, “Good appetite”). As throughout Europe, the continental style of eating is used, with the fork in the left hand and the knife in the right. They keep hands above the table but do not rest the elbows on it. Napkins are kept on the table throughout the meal.

It is not usually necessary to ask that food be passed across the table; reaching for what one wants is considered a sign that the guest is comfortable with the host. Leaving food on the plate is impolite; people are expected to take only what they will eat. Although tap water is safe to drink, many people prefer mineral water or some other beverage. At restaurants, guests usually seat themselves, and tips of 10 to 15 percent are customary.

LIFESTYLE

Family

Structure

The average Hungarian family consists of two parents and one or two children. Urban families tend to be smaller than rural families, who may have three or four children. In an effort to boost the population growth rate, the government provides support for families with three or more children; these families receive reduced taxes, free textbooks and meals at schools, and other incentives such as preferable loan terms and mortgage repayment relief.

In the Roma population and some Methodist, Baptist, and Nazarene churches, families rely on extended networks for support, but most Hungarians rely on their immediate or extended family. The number of single-parent families is growing.

Parents and Children

Though children typically move out of their parents' home when they go to college, most remain close to their families, visiting home on weekends. Many grown children live with their parents out of necessity because they cannot afford their own housing. Children are typically able to move when they become financially independent, which usually happens in their late twenties.

Aging parents generally are cared for by their children, who may live in the same house or nearby. It is expected that adult children support their parents, as their parents supported them when they were growing up.

Gender Roles

The family was traditionally headed by the father; the father supported the family financially and made the decisions for his family. Today it is mainly the breadwinner, regardless of gender, who heads the family. Both parents usually work.

Mothers are usually responsible for housework and child care. Men share some household responsibilities but traditionally take care of outside chores such as yard work. Children are usually expected to help their mother with housework.

Employed mothers are entitled to 180 days of maternity leave, which is usually paid at 70 percent of the previous year's salary; they then have the option to extend maternity

leave until their child is two years old. Mothers who do not meet the qualifying conditions and who have completed at least two years of tertiary education and are currently enrolled or graduated in the last year may receive a child-care fee until the child reaches age one.

Women face discrimination in the job market in terms of senior-level positions and salaries. Male candidates are often hired over similarly qualified female candidates for the same positions. Movements for more women in parliament and other roles have not been highly successful; around 12 percent of national legislative seats are filled by women.

Housing

Urban

Urban families usually live in apartments. The cost of living is high in cities, and housing is often limited. Apartment buildings in Hungarian cities were built mostly during the communist era. Made from concrete and not especially attractive, they make for a sharp contrast with the historic two-, three-, or four-storey buildings constructed during the 19th and early 20th centuries. These include neo-Baroque buildings with ornate facades and entranceways displaying mythological and allegorical figures.

An average urban dwelling has a larger-sized living room, two small bedrooms, one bathroom, a separate toilet, and a small kitchen. Laundry rooms are rare, so washing machines are often placed in bathrooms. Families tend to eat in the kitchen or at a folding table in the living room. Foldout couches are popular in living rooms, which are often used as bedrooms at night. Walls are often painted or wallpapered. Colored paint on walls has recently become more popular.

Rural

Rural families tend to live in larger homes than their urban counterparts. Most rural houses have tiled roofs and are made of brick. Rooms are often heated with wood, coal, or oil stoves, though central gas heat is becoming more common. Most rural homes also have gardens of fruits and vegetables.

Ownership

It is common for newly married couples to live with one set of parents while they save for a place of their own. Although lower interest rates have helped make buying a home more affordable, recent cuts to federal affordable housing programs have hurt many low-income renters. Well-off city dwellers often own or rent summer cottages in the countryside or in resort areas.

Dating and Marriage

Dating and Courtship

Young people like to go to movies, concerts, and theaters. They enjoy dancing, watching television, and talking together in plazas or shopping centers. Some ski and hike together. Many use the internet to meet each other. Most relationships are formed at school or during extracurricular activities. Girls start dating around the age of 13 and boys around the age of 15.

Engagement

Couples usually date for a few years before they become engaged. Families often organize a big dinner for the

proposal, but sometimes a proposal involves just the couple. Traditionally, the engagement party was thrown by the family of the bride-to-be; expenses are now more commonly shared between the bride and groom. Engagements can last anywhere from a few months to a few years.

Marriage in Society

Most Hungarians expect to marry and raise a family, but due to the high value placed on financial independence, the younger generation considers starting a career to be their top priority. Most people wait to marry until their early thirties, after they have finished schooling or are working. Urban couples tend to marry later than rural couples.

The marriage rate is relatively low, and about one-third of Hungarian marriages end in divorce. Cohabitation used to be looked down on but is now widely accepted. Unmarried couples who register with the government have some rights; it is now legally possible for partners to inherit from one another. Most parents, however, hope that their children will eventually marry. Pregnancy out of wedlock often leads to marriage. Hungary offers same-sex couples registered partnerships, which allow some legal rights. Same-sex marriage, however, is constitutionally banned, and the majority of Hungarians oppose legalization.

Weddings

Traditionally, weddings were elaborate three-day affairs, but these are rare today. All weddings are performed by a civil authority; religious couples have a church wedding in addition to the civil ceremony. The type of wedding celebration a couple has depends on their financial situation. A small wedding takes place during the week at the registrar's office and does not include fancy decorations or a program. More expensive celebrations might include an open-air venue, where a reception with an elaborate dinner and dancing is expected; around one hundred guests is average. Traditional rituals such as cutting the wedding cake together and pretending to kidnap the bride (and forcing the groom to perform tasks to win her back) take place during the reception. Hungarian couples typically go on honeymoon trips, but these do not always take place immediately after the wedding.

Life Cycle

Birth

Traditionally, people do not buy anything for their babies until after they are born. Most births occur in hospitals. It is increasingly common for fathers to be present for their children's births. The mother and baby are usually released from the hospital on the fifth day after birth. After the baby is born, fathers celebrate by going out to drink with their friends.

Hungarian babies have traditionally been named after their parents or after saints. Recently, there has been a trend toward naming them after characters on popular TV shows. In all cases, the names must be officially recognized by the government, and exceptions must be petitioned.

Each day of the year is associated with a particular name. So-called "name days," along with birthdays, are celebrated. Friends and family with the same name celebrate together. If a person's given name is not on the calendar, then he or she

decides when to celebrate a name day.

Milestones

Hungarians reach adulthood at the age of 18; some consider this birthday to be an important event that calls for a large celebration, but others celebrate it as a regular birthday. Eighteen-year-olds usually celebrate first with their family and then go out with friends, usually to drink alcohol, since 18 is the legal age for buying alcoholic beverages.

Death

After a death, the deceased's family traditionally did not sleep until the funeral. Family members spent the whole time in a room with the body, praying and singing. Hungarians wore black and mourned for a year after a person died. These traditions are no longer common among ethnic Hungarians, but they are followed among some minority groups.

Following a death, the funeral is organized as soon as possible and can be public or private. Public funerals are attended by family and friends, colleagues, neighbors, or anyone else who wishes to attend; people usually bring a wreath or a bunch of flowers to place on the grave after the funeral is over.

After the funeral, family members gather for dinner and to remember the person who died. On the anniversary of a death, family members of the deceased often attend a memorial mass and pay their respects at the gravesite.

Diet

Hungary's location in central Europe makes it a prime gathering point for many ethnic culinary specialties. One of the most famous Hungarian specialties is *gulyás* (goulash), a soup of meat, potatoes, onions, and paprika, a popular spice in many dishes.

Chicken and turkey are the most common meats in the Hungarian diet, followed by pork and beef. Dishes made of layered vegetables, minced meat or sausage, eggs, cheese, and sour cream are also common. Halászlé (fish soup), stuffed chicken, Töltött paprika (stuffed paprika peppers), and various kinds of strudel and pancakes are all part of the country's culinary tradition. With main meals, a cabbage or cucumber-and-vinegar salad is popular. Typical side dishes include noodles, potatoes, rice, and dumplings.

Except for certain seasonal varieties, vegetables and fruits are in ample supply year-round. Bread and pastries are available in a wide variety. Hungary is also proud of its many wines.

Recreation

Sports

Hungary's most popular sport is soccer. Other favorite activities include swimming, fencing, sailing, hunting, and fishing. Tennis and golf have become popular among wealthy Hungarians. Children practice sports such as soccer, basketball, and table tennis at school. They can also participate in school sports clubs, which compete against other schools.

Leisure

In their leisure time, many Hungarians like to take walks, visit parks or local museums, attend concerts, watch television, read, participate in choirs or book clubs, or work outside in

the garden. They may also meet in town to drink afternoon tea, eat a dessert, or relax at the local thermal bath.

Hungarians enjoy attending cultural festivals, most of which are connected to the food of a particular region—for example, the Sausage Festival, Melon Festival, and *Palinka* (alcohol made from fruit) Festival.

Hungary was once known as a nation of horsemen, especially because of the Hussars (15th-century light cavalry), who were famous for their horsemanship. Today, horses are used mostly in the tourist industry, but some Hungarians enjoy riding them for recreation.

Vacation

For vacations, many like to go to resort spas. Longer vacations are often spent at Lake Balaton, in the western region. Many also travel to neighboring countries. Vacations at Croatian beaches are popular among the less wealthy. Trips to Thailand, the Canary Islands, or the Maldives are only common among wealthy Hungarians.

The Arts

Hungarians consider their music and performing arts companies, art galleries, and other cultural institutions to be national treasures, and people attend whenever possible. Prominent Hungarian composers include Ferenc Erkel, Franz Liszt, Béla Bartók, and Zoltán Kodály. Bartók and Kodály both incorporated features of traditional Hungarian folk music into their works.

Hungarian folk music and dancing are still popular. Young people also enjoy contemporary music. The national dance is the *csárdás*, a courting dance in two parts (slow, then fast), which is performed at weddings, festivals, and other special occasions.

Hungary has a strong folk art tradition, including embroidery, ceramics, ceiling and wall painting, and wood and bone carving. However, commercialization threatens the existence of some of these art forms. Free-market policies introduced in the 1990s significantly reduced government support of the arts.

Holidays

Holidays include New Year's Day (1 January), War of Freedom Day (15 March, marking the 1848 rebellion and war), Easter (Sunday and Monday), Labor Day (1 May), Pentecost (50 days after Easter Sunday), Saint Stephen's Day (20 August), National Holiday (23 October, in honor of the 1956 uprising), All Souls' Day (31 October), Saint Nicholas Day (6 December), and Christmas (25–26 December).

War of Freedom Day

The symbol of the War of Freedom Day is the *kokárda*, a small ribbon of red, white, and green (the colors of the national flag). This ribbon was worn by the revolutionaries in 1848, and people buy or make ribbons and pin them to their coats to celebrate on 15 March.

Ceremonies are held all over Hungary to commemorate the events and heroes of the revolution. Sándor Petőfi, the author of the poem that is said to have inspired the revolution, is often remembered on this occasion.

Easter

Religious people attend church services and gather with their

families on Easter Sunday. Traditional foods eaten at Easter include boiled smoked ham, boiled eggs, and sausages.

On Easter Monday, it is customary in some places for boys to sprinkle girls with water or cologne as a sign that the girl is a flower that should not wilt. Also traditional at this time are making and displaying elaborately painted Easter eggs.

Saint Nicholas Day and Christmas

On the night before Saint Nicholas Day (6 December), children shine their shoes and put them on the windowsills of their bedrooms so Saint Nicholas can leave candy and chocolates in them. Saint Nicholas, or Santa Claus, is not associated with the actual Christmas holiday; the baby Jesus is the bringer of Christmas gifts and sometimes the Christmas tree.

The most important part of the Christmas season is Christmas Eve. People spend the day decorating their Christmas trees and preparing dinner; traditional foods include fish soup, stuffed cabbage, cottage cheese noodles with bacon, and *beigli* (a sweet rolled pastry filled with poppy seeds or walnuts). Christmas lights are popular, and people hang stockings even though most homes do not have fireplaces. More traditional décor includes handmade decorations using natural materials like nut shells and dried flowers; children often make these decorations as gifts for friends and relatives. Hungarians spend time with their extended families on 25 and 26 December.

Festivals and Other Holidays

Local festivals commemorate various folk or religious events throughout the year. In rural areas, a local festival called a *búcsu* is celebrated on the name day of the village's patron saint. Many local festivals mark the beginning or end of the harvest season; others are centered on a special food of the region, such as the sausage, onion, or plum. For example, a Sausage Festival celebrating the famous Csabai sausage takes place in Békéscsaba at the end of October. The celebrations include presentations on how sausage is made, a sausage-eating competition, and cultural programs on several stages.

On 20 August, Saint Stephen's Day (also called Constitution Day or the Day of New Bread), Hungarians remember the first king of Hungary, Saint Stephen. This day also marks the end of the harvest, and traditionally, Hungarians baked their first bread using the newly-harvested wheat. Celebrations throughout the country include cultural programs, singing, dancing, and fireworks. Thousands of people gather on the banks of the Danube River to watch the fireworks in Budapest.

Celebrated on 23 October, National Holiday commemorates the start of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, a spontaneous uprising against the Soviet-ruled Hungarian People's Republic. Many Hungarians were killed or imprisoned and then executed for their participation. Commemorating this holiday was banned for 25 years, but after the fall of communism in 1989, 23 October became a national holiday. Some communities hold a celebration in their town square to celebrate this day.

People also observe personal holidays called name days. A name day, often more significant than a birthday, commemorates the saint after whom a person is named. It is

celebrated with gifts, flowers, and cards.

SOCIETY

Government

Structure

Hungary is a parliamentary republic composed of 19 counties. The president is head of state, and the prime minister is head of government. The 199-member parliament, called the Országgyűlés (National Assembly), elects the president and prime minister (on the recommendation of the president). One hundred and six members of parliament are elected directly in single-member constituencies, while 93 members are elected directly in a single nationwide constituency through a proportional representation system; all members serve four-year terms. Hungary is a member of the European Union.

Political Landscape

Hungary's government is a large multiparty system. The right-wing Fidesz–Hungarian Civic Alliance (commonly referred to as Fidesz) has been the ruling party since parliamentary elections in 2010. Other political parties include Fidesz's ally, the Christian Democratic People's Party (KDNP); the center-left Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP); and the far-right nationalist Jobbik party. Many challenges face Hungary, including widespread corruption and a weakened system of checks and balances.

Government and the People

Hungary's constitution was rewritten in 2011 and went into effect in early 2012. Amendments to the constitution have allowed the Fidesz-led government to gain greater influence over the judiciary, the central bank, the media, health care, and education. The government has also tightened its grip on Hungarian culture by staging pro-government exhibitions and replacing cultural institution heads with regime loyalists.

Freedoms of speech, expression, association, and assembly are guaranteed by the constitution. Religious freedoms are generally respected, though many Hungarian religious institutions had to re-register for government recognition and funding in 2011, and many groups were denied. Discrimination against Jewish and Roma minorities, which often comes from right-wing politicians, is a major issue. Past elections have been considered free and fair, but voter turnout remains low, and some Hungarians are concerned that the constitution limits the political participation of ethnic minorities and those with intellectual and mental disabilities. Around 60 percent of registered voters participated in the 2014 parliamentary election. The voting age is 18, 16 if married.

Economy

Due in part to Hungary's large budget deficit, the economy nearly collapsed in the face of the 2008 global financial crisis. Loans worth US\$25 billion from the World Bank, the European Union (EU), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) were issued to keep the country's economy afloat. In 2010, the new government enacted tax cuts for business and personal income, though it also enforced higher taxes on

financial institutions, energy and telecom firms, and retailers. Hungary's economy began slowly recovering in 2011, though the government rejected the terms for further bailout funds in 2012. Hungary has recently made progress in reducing its budget deficit.

The transition to a free-market economy was difficult for many of Hungary's citizens, who endured higher prices, higher taxes, and a lower standard of living. Many are able to afford the consumer items now available on the market; however, others, especially in the east, are at or below the poverty line. Hungary welcomes foreign investment and trade to build its economy and increase its hard currency reserves.

Strong foreign investment, stable government institutions, a booming small-business sector, and a hardworking labor force are key strengths, giving Hungary the potential for a bright future. Industries account for over 30 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP); services account for nearly 65 percent, and agriculture plays a small role in the economy as well. Important natural resources include bauxite, coal, and natural gas. The currency is the forint (HUF).

Transportation and Communications

Public transportation in Hungary is well-developed. Budapest and other large cities have trams, buses, and taxis. Budapest also has an underground subway system, and an extensive train network serves most of the country. Currently, less than half of Hungarians own private cars, and public transport is the principal mode of travel. Bicycles are used for short distances.

The communications system has improved since privatization. Most families have a television and radio. There are several local broadcast channels, and cable television is available. Several national and regional papers service the country. Magazines and other publications abound. The press is active and striving to be competitive with foreign media companies investing in Hungary. The establishment of the National Agency for Data Protection has created a more restricted press environment, with greater press censorship and politically motivated licensing procedures for radio stations. Hungary has an extensive cellular telephone network, and personal cellular phones are commonplace. Internet usage has increased greatly over the past few years, although computers remain an expensive item.

Education

Structure and Access

Schooling is free and compulsory for all children ages four to sixteen. There are also some *crèches*, or day cares, for young children. The majority of schools are public, but a few private schools also exist.

Students normally attend primary schools for eight years. Afterward, students choose from a variety of secondary schools, depending on their interests and abilities. Elite secondary schools and schools that require a special skill, such as a language, require entrance exams for admission.

Hungarian students are not required to wear uniforms, but families are responsible for buying textbooks, copybooks, and other school supplies. The government provides textbooks for

all students in primary education and for disadvantaged students in secondary education.

School Life

Teachers typically choose their material based on what will best prepare students for final exams. Teaching as a profession is not well respected, and teachers are not well paid. The authoritative method of teaching, which focuses on memorization, is common. Individual learning is emphasized more than teamwork.

Beginning in elementary school, foreign language classes are offered. Other classes include math, Hungarian grammar and literature, and history, as well as elective subjects. Students go on a field trip each year: primary students take a short, one-day trip, and secondary students often take a three- or four-day trip.

At the end of both primary school and secondary school, the graduation class participates in a *ballagás*, a type of graduation ceremony in which the graduates walk around their school building to say good-bye to teachers and classmates. Secondary schools hold a Storks' Ball for their first-year students, who are known as "storks." At the end of the final year of secondary school, students participate in a ribbon ceremony; graduates receive a small ribbon with the school logo and the year on it. The graduating class performs a short, funny program based on their experiences in secondary school. The ceremony is followed by dinner and a party.

Higher Education

At the end of secondary education, students take a tough graduation exam, which consists of written and oral questions in six different subjects, in order to receive their degree. Those who successfully complete secondary school may go on to any one of numerous colleges, universities, or technical schools.

University education was free before 1994, but now all except the best students must pay tuition. In efforts to combat both brain drain (when well-educated and trained people emigrate from their country to work in another) and the growing burden on taxpayers, a law was passed in September 2012 that requires students who receive state funding to work in Hungary two years for every year they spend at university; if they leave Hungary before this period, they are required to pay back the money they received from the state.

Some students choose to attend universities close to their homes in order to save money. Eötvös Lóránd University, in Budapest, is the most prestigious Hungarian university. Other prominent institutions include Szeged University, Corvinus University, University of *Debrecen, and Szent István*

University. To graduate from college, students must pass a foreign language exam. Lovari, a Roma dialect with a relatively limited vocabulary, can be learned in two or three months and is popular with students who need a language certificate in order to receive their degree.

Higher education is not always highly valued. Many parents believe their children will be better off learning a trade than obtaining a degree. However, young people often

decide to study at a university anyway. A bachelor's degree takes six to eight semesters to earn; a master's degree requires an additional four semesters.

Health

Hungary's healthcare system is well organized and modern. Standards in hospitals and clinics are generally high. However, the lack of adequate funding for the system seriously threatens the quality of care.

Healthcare professionals are well trained but not necessarily well paid. Citizens receive free care in public institutions, and the cost of some medicine is subsidized. Patients are often expected to give "gratitude money" or small gifts to healthcare professionals in addition to standard medical costs. Patients must pay to see private doctors.

Major health hazards include pollution, a traditionally high-fat diet, high alcohol intake, and widespread smoking. Hungary also has one of the highest suicide rates in the world. These factors combine to give Hungary one of Europe's lowest life expectancy rates.

AT A GLANCE

Contact Information

Embassy of Hungary, 3910 Shoemaker Street NW, Washington, DC 20008; phone (202) 362-6730; web site <https://washington.mfa.gov.hu/eng>. Wow Hungary Travel Guide; web site <https://wowhungary.com/>.

Country and Development Data

| | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| Capital | Budapest |
| Population | 9,699,577 (rank=92) |
| Area (sq. mi.) | 35,918 (rank=108) |
| Area (sq. km.) | 93,028 |
| Human Development Index | 44 of 189 countries |
| Gender Inequality Index | 55 of 162 countries |
| GDP (PPP) per capita | \$33,600 |
| Adult Literacy | 99% (male); 99% (female) |
| Infant Mortality | 4.62 per 1,000 births |
| Life Expectancy | 72 (male); 79 (female) |
| Currency | Forint |

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